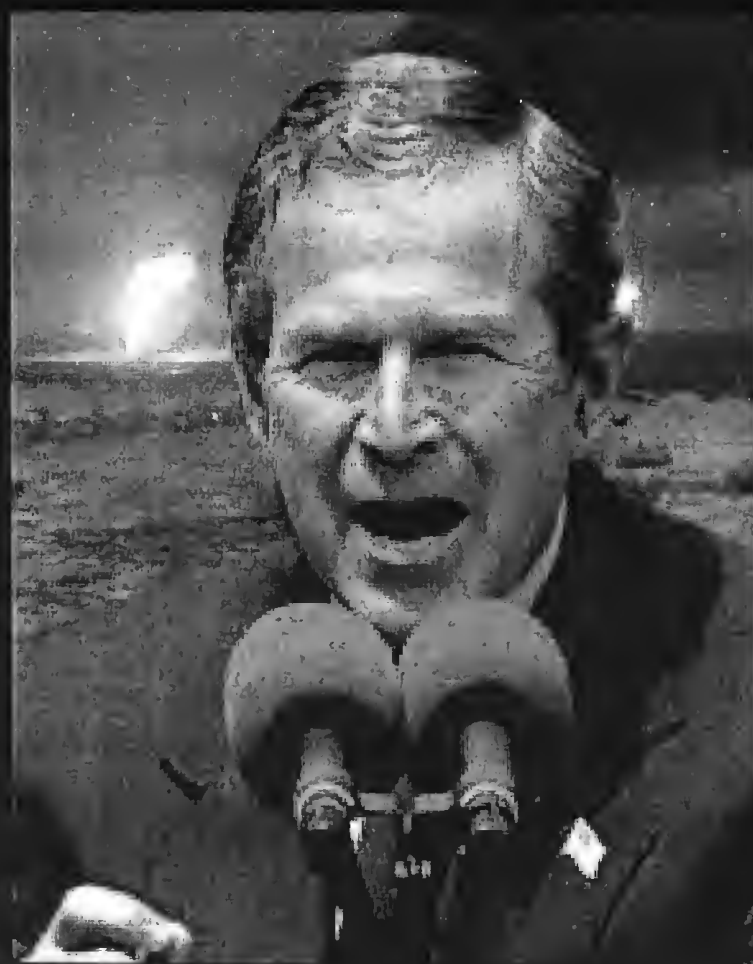


# **Socialist Review**

**Aotearoa/New Zealand**

For a socialist and democratic alternative

Issue 12 Spring 2002 \$2



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## In this issue...

- 3 The election**
- 5 The coming war on Iraq**
- 7 Israel – America's favourite  
rogue state**
- 8 Media bias**
- 10 Behind the teachers' dispute**
- 14 Unions and struggle**
- 15 Latin America – the crisis  
spreads**
- 19 Red Words – reviews**
- 23 Where we stand,  
subscription details**

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# Election – nothing's changed

By Dougal McNeill

One thing's for sure: Labour is going to do nothing over the next three years for the workers who elected them, unless they're forced to. Most people are thoroughly sick of hearing about the election and politics and a major part of the reason for this is the thoroughly boring campaign both Labour and National ran. Although it relies for its support on working people, Helen Clark's Labour Party was very careful not to promise them anything of substance for this term.

In the Governor-General's speech in August it was made clear what the Government's priorities are – lifting the moratorium on GE in Aotearoa, pleasing business and keeping the New Right agenda of the last two decades on track.

But there's another side to this election – it was the lowest voter turnout since records began. This *doesn't* mean that all the people who didn't bother voting are hardened anti-capitalists rejecting the system (if only...) but it does show that there is a growing layer of workers who feel disillusioned with the system. It is vital that all of us who are interested in fighting for social justice work to turn this disillusionment into anger and confidence to fight. Because, now more than ever, the old truth that

change comes only outside parliament is one we need to remember.

## The Peters Principle

Winston Peters and his racist New Zealand First Party managed to score a surprise comeback on election night. While in 1999 they got under the necessary five percent to get into parliament and had to sail in on Winston's coat-tails, this time around NZ First arrived as the third largest party.



*Jim's still smiling – pity about the party...*

It's hard to say how much of this vote came from frustrated National supporters and how much came from former Labour and Alliance voters, but the results are worrying. Many on the left certainly underestimated the pull that Peters would have. He campaigned on an openly racist, anti-immigration and anti-Treaty programme. This kind of filth can fill a political vacuum and act as a vent for people's frustrations when

there are no coherent political alternatives being offered.

Over the next three years we need to step up campaigns to counter Peters' lies and racism. Immigrants don't take jobs –



*Alliance election poster – three years of complete submission to Labour saw them wiped off the electoral map*

government policies and business greed do. The rich are the real bludgers, not Maori. These slogans, although they may sound simplistic, are the key to organising against NZ First and their influence. Peters and his party are at home on the Right, supporting business and employers – his rotten record in the 1996 National Coalition Government proves this. We need to expose NZ First for the scumbags they are.

Meanwhile the Labour Party have shown themselves so desperate to stay in office that they'll make deals with anyone – even United Future. United are a strange mix of homophobic freaks, anti-abortion crackpots, Christian wackos and out-and-out

opportunists. They certainly say something about Helen Clark's priorities!

Labour's former coalition partner, the Alliance, didn't even manage to get 1.5 percent of the vote and are now no longer in parliament. We analysed the decline of the Alliance in our last issue but, although their defeat comes as no surprise, it is nothing to celebrate. The Alliance were the last mainstream party in New Zealand that stood in the tradition of social democratic politics and – whatever disagreements revolutionary socialists might have with them – they fought for gains like paid parental leave, longer holidays and better conditions. Their demise is a setback for workers in Aotearoa and the building of a left movement.

#### **Alliance**

But, if we are going to avoid making the same mistakes again, we need to learn from the tragedy of the Alliance. For almost ten years some of the best activists in the country battled away inside the Alliance and time and time again their issues (and the good of New Zealand workers) were set aside for some parliamentary manoeuvre, some deal to be cashed-in in the future, some compromise that was always necessary at the time.

Every time the Alliance became more "moderate" to avoid losing support, its support dropped! The policies Laila Harre campaigned on this time round read like nothing compared to the basic demands the Alliance was founded on – free education, free healthcare, raising benefits and scrapping (properly) the Employment Contracts Act.

Time and time again working people have indicated that these are the kind of policies they support. It's only when it becomes obvious these sorts of policies are not going to be acted on that the

kind of racist scapegoating the Member for Tauranga specialises in starts to have any pull.

Each time Alliance members put their faith in parliament instead of workers and their potential power, the strength of the Right in the party grew a little more until, by the time the party split in two, it had lost many of its key members and supporters. This shows the logic of relying on reforms from within the system. The best way to fight for real change is where we have the power – through strikes, occupations, marches and militant action – and not where our rulers are at their strongest.

The next three years will be full of challenges and opportunities for socialists. Labour and their Christian wacko allies have no intentions of delivering anything for workers, students, Māori or the unemployed. But the "honeymoon" for Labour, when we all breathed a sigh of relief at seeing National out after nine years, is well and truly over.

We need to learn from the mistakes of the Alliance and focus our anger and resentment where the employers and government will feel it most – in our power as organised workers. Recent industrial actions like the secondary school teachers and the brave wildcat strikes of the Wellington railway workers show the way forward. ■

# The coming war on Iraq

*Elizabeth Schulte reports on new revelations of the Bush gang's plan for a war on Iraq*



Some 250,000 US Marines and soldiers. Hundreds of warplanes based in as many as eight countries. An air assault against thousands of targets, including airfields, roadways and communications sites. Special Operations forces or CIA agents striking depots or laboratories storing suspected "weapons of mass destruction."

These are a few of the details of the US government's plan for a war on Iraq, as described in a Pentagon document leaked to the *New York Times* at the beginning of July. Defence Secretary Donald Rumsfeld says that he's determined to sniff out the source of the leak. But since September 11, it has been anything but a secret that Rumsfeld and the rest of George W. Bush's war team are itching to attack Iraq.

First, there were the frenzied attempts to link Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein with the September 11 hijackers. Then the equally frenzied effort to blame Iraq for the anthrax attacks last year. That story fell through, too, but Bush continued his witch-hunt, naming Iraq as part of "the axis of evil" in his State of the Union address.

The regular charge is that Saddam and his regime are assembling "weapons of mass destruction." Unfortunately for the hawks, there's little evidence of this. Iraq has been in a state of virtual collapse since the 1991 Gulf War, not only because of US bombs, but also because of more than a decade of economic sanctions.

But the Bush gang isn't letting the truth get in the way. In June, the administration leaked its plan to use Special Operations forces to assassinate Saddam. The leak served the purpose of convincing the Iraqi government that proposed new teams of United Nations (UN) weapons inspectors might well contain killers.

As former inspector Scott Ritter wrote in the *Los Angeles Times*, "Absent any return of weapons inspectors, no one seems willing to challenge the Bush administration's assertions of an Iraqi threat... The true target of the supposed CIA plan may not be Hussein but rather the weapons inspection programme itself. The real casualty is the last chance to avoid bloody conflict."

The administration's saber rattling at Iraq, whether openly or through leaks to the media, serves another purpose – shifting attention away from the rotten economy and White House connections to corporate crime.

That's why not every round of stories about the Pentagon's invasion plans should be taken as a sign that an attack is coming soon. But the White House wants a war.



It faces some roadblocks, though. Dick Cheney's tour of the Middle East earlier this year to drum up support ran into stronger than expected

## *Partners in crime?*

opposition from US allies among Arab governments.

The trip came just as Israel was escalating its terror campaign against Palestinians. Arab leaders who want the US to topple Saddam nevertheless won't openly support Washington if they know this could

spark massive anger from below.

## Planning another slaughter in Iraq

Even European leaders have been cautious. Bush's loyal stable boy, British Prime Minister Tony Blair, was careful to announce that, while a regime change was "desirable," the objective was "getting the inspectors back in."

A US sponsored "regime change" in Iraq will be harder to accomplish than the quick "victory" in Afghanistan. No one can predict when George W. Bush will strike Iraq. The assault could come early next year – or even sooner. But some things are certain.

Bush Junior is determined to "finish" what his father started in Iraq – protect the US government's plunder of oil resources in the Middle East and prove that Washington calls the shots.

Opponents of war have to fight him every step of the way. ■



No country since Vietnam has suffered more destruction from US military power than Iraq. The 1991 Gulf War killed an estimated 200,000 people in a period of just six weeks. US warplanes dropped more tons of bombs on Iraq faster than in any other aerial bombardment in the history of warfare.

And when the "war" was over and Iraqi soldiers and civilians were retreating, the US attacked again – turning the road from Kuwait to Basra into the "highway of death."

Then came a decade of economic warfare – in the form of United Nations sanctions. Diseases that had been wiped out decades ago now flourish in Iraq because of shortages of basic medical supplies. Some 5,000 children die every single month because of sanctions.

But still George W. Bush isn't satisfied. He wants more blood – and the only question is when, not if. The saber rattling has grown louder over the past several months, with more and more "leaked" war plans showing up in the media.

The latest scenario is called the "inside-out" plan. US forces would go after the Iraqi capital of Baghdad – with warplanes pounding a city of five million people and troops carrying out operations in the streets.

Bush claims that he's after the "evil" Saddam Hussein. Of course, many of the same officials running Bush's war machine today were extending the hand of friendship to Saddam in the 1980s – when President Ronald Reagan decided to back Iraq in the Iran-Iraq War. This with the full knowledge that Saddam possessed chemical weapons and was prepared to use them.

Bush's plans for war have nothing to do with concerns about democracy or justice. "What talks in the region? Power," raved right-wing *Washington Post* columnist Charles Krauthammer earlier this year. "Fear. Respect for American power."

The Bush gang is ready to wreak further havoc in Iraq to show that the US government can do whatever it likes around the globe.

A debate has broken out within the Washington establishment about Bush's war plans. Some veteran hawks – like Brent Scowcroft, the former national security adviser and tight Bush family friend, and former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger – publicly opposed launching a new attack. In the *Wall Street Journal*, Scowcroft warned that an invasion could unleash "an Armageddon in the Middle East."

These hawks haven't turned into doves. They're just worried that this isn't the right time or the right reason to go after Iraq. After all, the Bush administration has failed to produce any link at all between Saddam and the September 11 attacks – the main justification for Bush's "war on terrorism."

The US doesn't have any evidence that the Iraqi regime is producing the "weapons of mass destruction" that Bush claims. And even staunch US allies in Europe and the Middle East are opposing any new US action against Iraq.

Given all the lies that Washington has told during its race to war, it's no surprise that a majority of people say they support military action against Iraq to oust Saddam. What's surprising, in fact, is the growing numbers who have doubts – who have begun to question the administration's claim that a devastated and poverty-stricken society represents a threat to the US. These doubts will only grow as the US moves closer to an all-out assault.

Iraq has been devastated by more than a decade of US war. But the Bush gang has even worse in store. We have to stand up and speak out against Bush's new war on Iraq before it begins. ■



# America's favourite rogue state

You wouldn't know it from mainstream media reports, but Israel's war on the Palestinians has become even more vicious in recent months, in what amounts to a series of war crimes. Collective punishments and assassinations – outlawed by the Geneva Convention and condemned by every human rights organisation, even in Israel itself – have become the norm.

In June Israeli tanks reoccupied most Palestinian towns in the West Bank, imposing curfews, demolishing houses and infrastructure and terrorising the population.

More than 750,000 Palestinians are under collective "house arrest." Children can't go to school, and their parents can't go to work. Israeli troops have killed dozens of unarmed civilians, including many children, for the "crime" of being on the street. A columnist in Israel's *Ha'aretz* newspaper wrote: "There are not many other cities in the world... in which tanks have the run of the streets and fire shells into population centres."

The siege has made already desperate conditions in the Occupied Territories even worse. Poverty and unemployment have climbed to 75 percent and 65 percent respectively. Aid organisations report that people are eating weeds to survive, while UN Secretary General Kofi Annan told the Security Council that two million Palestinians are in dire need of food and medical assistance and more than half of Palestinian children show signs of "chronic or acute malnutrition."

## ***Tess Lee Ack* shows how state terrorism is just fine – if you're helping US foreign policy**

In July, 21 male relatives of suicide bombers were arrested and threatened with deportation to Gaza. Lior Yavne, from the Israeli human rights organisation B'Tselem, claimed that "This is basically a collective punishment, prohibited by the Geneva Convention, Israel law and Jewish morals," and even the US and the Israeli courts felt compelled to oppose it.

But Israel's Justice Minister was defiant, saying that if "those families have been supportive to the suicide bomber from their own family, if they knew about it and it is proved they knew about and did not prevent it, that would give the legitimacy to do such a deporting." Since Israel routinely uses torture, it will probably not be difficult to get the "evidence" they need.

In late July, Israel assassinated Hamas leader Salah Shehada – along with his wife, daughter and neighbours, including nine children – in an operation described

by Prime Minister and war criminal Ariel Sharon as "one of Israel's greatest successes."

Following a barrage of criticism, Sharon feigned regret for the deaths of civilians, blaming military and intelligence failures. But as the chairman of his own parliament's foreign affairs and defence committee, Haim Ramon, remarked, "[the military] does not send an F16 to a populated area without political authorisation."

Quite. The Gaza strip is the most densely populated piece of land on the planet. A missile fired into a neighbourhood of apartment buildings could not fail to kill and injure many people.

With all these outrages, Sharon and the Israeli government are cashing the blank cheque that George Bush has given them. His much-vaunted speech proposing a "solution" to the conflict amounted to a demand that Palestinians surrender unconditionally.

Sharon's demand that Palestinians dump Arafat was enthusiastically adopted by Bush, who essentially said that he won't accept the legitimacy of Palestinian elections unless they produce the result that Washington wants. This outrageous condition barely raised an eyebrow among the pro-Israel media and commentators.

Of course, US presidents have ordered – and arranged – the overthrow of

governments before. But Bush has become more confident to call openly for a "regime change" – in Palestine, in Iraq and anywhere else he wants to.

Bush's plan is basically a US seal of approval for Israel's continued occupation. For Palestinians, that means a never-ending nightmare of occupation, curfews, closures and desperate poverty – punctuated by savage military offensives.

If the US wanted to, it could restrain Israel by withholding the massive economic and military aid without which Israel could not survive. But no US president has ever been interested in justice for Palestinians. Every "peace plan" of recent years, from Reagan to Clinton, has aimed to force Palestinians to abandon their fight for a genuine state.

But as the continued Palestinian resistance shows, there can be no "peace" without justice. ■

# Bad news from Israel

## study confirms media bias against Palestinians

If you don't understand the Middle East conflict it might be because you're watching it on TV news. That's the conclusion reached by researchers at Glasgow University's Mass Media Group after a study of people's perceptions of television news coverage of the recent *Intifada* or Palestinian uprising.

The study interviewed audience groups with a cross-section of ages and backgrounds, asking them a series of questions about the conflict and what they had understood from TV news. Another 300 young people filled in a questionnaire. News items on the conflict were analysed closely by researchers.

The results showed that the audience had overwhelmingly absorbed the main "message" of the news – of conflict, violence and tragedy, but few had gained any understanding of the reasons for the conflict and its origins. Explanations were rarely given on the news and

when they were journalists tended to speak in a sort of shorthand.

The study group were asked where the Palestinian refugees had come from and how they had become refugees. Only eight percent knew that the refugees were displaced from their homes and land when Israel was established in 1948 in a military offensive to clear the interior of the future Israeli state.

Shortly later more Palestinians were forced to flee a second war between Israel and its Arab neighbours. Many of these refugees moved to Gaza and the West Bank of the Jordan River. In 1967 Israel fought another war against its neighbours during which it occupied Gaza and the West Bank, bringing the Palestinian refugees under its military control. East Jerusalem was later taken from Jordan as well.

Palestinians bitterly resisted these military occupations and the Israeli



"settlements." These were far more than just houses. They were part of a strategy of military control over an occupied people.

For the images of suicide bombings and protests to make any real sense at least some of these very basic facts would need to be explained by mainstream journalists. They rarely are, and we are left with images without context.

Of 3,536 lines of text from TV news items on the *Intifada* analysed by the Glasgow study, only 17 attempted to provide any explanation of the conflict's history. It was clear from the audience study that most people did not know that the Palestinians were subject to an Israeli military occupation and did not know who was "occupying" the Occupied Territories.

Only nine percent of those taking part knew that it was the Israelis who were occupying the territories and that the settlers were Israeli. Slightly more (11 percent) thought that the Palestinians were occupying the territories and that the settlers were Palestinian.

A lack of discussion on the news of the conflict's origins clearly operates in favour of Israel. For example the Israeli settlement policy is widely regarded as illegal in International Law. Some newspaper coverage describes the settlements as "illegal" but this is rarely done on TV. Without any discussion of the origins of the conflict, the report points out, all we are left with are accounts of day-to-day events, in which it seems that things are only disrupted when the Palestinians riot or bomb.

The study found that the TV coverage tends to oscillate between this and the view that violence was perpetrated by both sides in a "cycle of revenge" or "tit for tat" killings.

From the Israeli government viewpoint the Palestinians are merely terrorists to whom they are "responding." The study found many

for the murder of those resisting the illegal Israeli occupation."

Reports of Palestinian attacks were found to include extremely negative language like "savage cold-blooded killing," "murder," "atrocities" and "lynching." There was an unspoken assumption of Palestinian fault. On the other hand, reports of Israeli killings of Palestinians often went to great lengths to either explain the deaths as accidental or as being solely in response to Palestinian "violence."

Since the beginning of the present *Intifada*, around ten times the number of Palestinians have in fact been killed than Israelis.

The biased nature of news coverage had measurable effects on public understanding. As one 18 year old in the study commented: "You always think of the Palestinians as being really aggressive because of the stories you hear on the news. I always put the blame on them in my own head." ■  
Andrew Cooper



*A Palestinian cartoon satirises the Western media's portrayal of Israeli attacks on the Occupied Territories*

examples of this viewpoint being actively promoted by journalists. Palestinian bombings were frequently reported as "starting" a series of events, which necessitated an Israeli "response." The degree to which journalists adopt the Israeli viewpoint can be seen if we reverse some of the common statements used. The study found no coverage where it was reported that "The Palestinian attacks were in retaliation

Read more on the Web:  
<http://www.gla.ac.uk/Acad/Sociology/media.html>

# Behind the teachers' dispute

While the teachers' dispute may be settled for the time being, the underlying causes of the crisis in our education system are far from over. The wave of wildcat strikes by high school teachers in May, followed by the incredible mass student protests in June, have raised many important questions.

In the following pages, **Andrew Cooper** looks at the background to the dispute and the student protests, while **David Garland** explains the limits of trade unions.



## What's it all about?

**While the latest round of the teachers' dispute may be over for now, the long-term problems facing our education system aren't.**

There are several key problems.

First is a long-term but drastic fall in teachers' real income. Teachers' salaries today have around 20-30 percent less buying power than in 1980. This, of course, is not a problem restricted to teachers. During much of the '70s and '80s inflation remained high but most workers were able to win pay rises at or above the level of inflation, so their real incomes at least stood still or increased slightly.

For the past decade, pay rises for the vast majority of workers have been almost non-existent. If this were happening in a period of high inflation it would mean a sudden drop in real income and provoke industrial action in response. When inflation is mostly below three percent however, you don't really notice a very small reduction in your spending power from year to year. *But*, after a decade of this, many workers are now really feeling a drop of up to 30 percent in their incomes.

## Timeline

### **(2002) 18 February:**

56 percent of teachers reject government pay offer giving them 3.5 percent pay rise and guaranteed three paid hours away from classroom each week.

**1 March:** Strikes and protest marches in several areas.

**12 March:** PPTA announces rolling strikes for next term and teachers will refuse to pass NCEA marks on to NZQA.

**25 March:** Education Minister Trevor Mallard calls off talks with PPTA after some Auckland teachers roster home third form students, saying negotiations won't resume until all industrial action called off.

**8 May:** Teachers at Hutt Valley High School, Counties Manakau, Manawatu, Bay of Plenty, Marlborough and Wairarapa walk out in wildcat strikes after Ministry of Education places full page adverts in newspapers blaming teachers for the dispute.

**16 May:** PPTA and government reach deal – 5.5 percent pay rise over three years (less than inflation) and allowance for implementing NCEA. PPTA President Jen McCutcheon attends Labour's Election Year Congress in Wellington two days later. Teachers accuse her of rushing to make a weak deal in

order to look good at the conference.

**17 May:** Teachers at Auckland's Orewa College stage wildcat strike in opposition to PPTA deal.

**21 May:** Teachers at Onslow College and other schools join wildcat strikes in defiance of PPTA executive.

**22 May:** Wildcat strikes spread to schools around country, Jen McCutcheon attacks striking teachers as "irresponsible." Students join teachers in many of the protests.

**7 June:** Trevor Mallard threatens to put teachers on individual contracts if the dispute is not settled.

**10 June:** Teachers vote overwhelmingly against latest government offer of 5.5 percent rise over three years and NCEA allowance.

**11 June:** PPTA places ban on extracurricular activities such as school sports and drama and choir activities.

**12 June (Wednesday):** First protests by students at Riccarton High School against extracurricular activities' ban. Teachers at Onslow College refuse to implement ban, calling it the one thing that will divide staff and upset students and parents.

**13 June (Thursday):** Protests spread like wildfire to schools around the country.

**14 June (Friday):** Mass protests continue.

**17 June (Monday):** PPTA calls off rostering home, claiming student protests spiralling out of control and attacks protesters as "rioters". Sports ban stays in place but is widely ignored.

**21 June:** PPTA tables new claim after nationwide teachers' meetings reject last government offer. PPTA now seeking \$6,000 NCEA allowance over two years.

**8 July:** PPTA rejects government offer of \$1,000 NCEA allowance.

[continued next page]

Another problem is the competitive model in schools, which now have to "promote" themselves by advertising and competing against other schools. Apart from its inherent absurdities, the competitive model has also meant more work for teachers around such things as ERO visits.

A third factor behind the current unrest is the increase in social problems teachers have to deal with. Increasing inequality and poverty means more behavioural problems for students in poorer schools. Teachers increasingly have to act as social workers as well as dealing with more problems in the classroom.

Finally, the new qualifications system, the NCEA, was the straw that broke the camel's back. Whatever its merits it was obvious that it would involve a significant increase in workload on a group of workers already strained to breaking point.

So the crisis in secondary education is the result of several long-term factors. Its manifestations are increasing workloads and problems recruiting and retaining staff. Teachers see pay and workload as the key issues, and despite government claims, the two can't be separated. Only better pay and conditions will attract new teachers – and only new teachers who stay in the job can effectively reduce overall workloads.

It's estimated that the average age of teachers is now about 46, and that most new teachers only last one to two years in the job.

With all this in mind, it's little wonder that teachers reacted so angrily to their union leadership's acceptance of an "offer" that effectively meant pay cuts (5.5 percent over three years – less than inflation) and an insultingly low payment for extra NCEA work.

The PPTA's rotten deals do nothing to address the real concerns



of teachers – let alone the more fundamental problems with the education system.

The corporate media has been quick to label the teachers' actions as hurting students – as if a few days rostering off was the cause of the problem! It's important to emphasise that in resisting attempts to increase their workload further, teachers are actually fighting to improve students' conditions too, just as striking nurses are protesting about cuts in health services as much as their own conditions.

We have to see the crisis in education as part of a much wider attack on living standards that includes unemployment, declining healthcare and falling real wages for most workers. Any attempt to tilt the balance in our favour again must broaden its sights towards a goal of addressing all these attacks. ■

**12 July:** Government announces agreement to set up independent panel to mediate in the dispute.

**14 July:** PPTA says it will have to consult members first. Strikes planned for 17, 18 and 19 July.

**18 July:** PPTA rejects government demands to speed up consultation with members on Arbitration, calling Trevor Mallard's tactics "bullying." Strikes to continue until decision made.

**19 July:** NZQA says some NCEA certificates won't be confirmed if teachers continue withholding results.

**22 July:** Education Ministry report confirms teachers' claims that NCEA forcing much heavier workloads on them.

**23 July:** PPTA members vote in support of "Alternative Dispute Resolution" (ie Arbitration). Strikes planned for the following days called off.

**29 July:** PPTA officially lifts extracurricular ban.

**9 August:** Government pushes ahead with introduction of Sixth Form NCEA, despite being in the middle of Arbitration.

**19 August:** Arbitration panel delivers recommendations.

# Revolting students...

The student protests that erupted across the country from 12-14 June were one of the most inspiring events of recent years.

The actions came after the PPTA secondary teachers' union took the extraordinary step of banning extracurricular activities like sport, plays and music as part of its low level industrial action on 11 June.

This was without question the worst possible strategy the PPTA could have adopted. It put absolutely no real pressure on the government, while simultaneously dividing staff and alienating students and parents.

It's hard to know whether the PPTA leadership was just being plain stupid or if it was deliberately trying to provoke a crisis that would scare teachers into following the union's lead without question.



Again and again they made it clear that their anger was directed at the government and PPTA leadership – not their teachers.

## 1968 – students almost spark a revolution

In May-June 1968 France teetered on the brink of revolution. After days of brutal police attacks on demonstrations, Paris

### Inspiring protests

Not surprisingly, the protesting students were pilloried by the corporate media and the PPTA. Among the usual hysteria about "anarchy on the streets" (*Evening Post*) and "rioting" (PPTA) came the more serious accusation that most protesters were merely taking advantage of the situation to wag school.



This is rubbish. The overwhelming majority of students who walked out of their classes in June took part in protests rather than simply hanging round in town or going home. Large numbers of media interviews with protesting students, their letters to newspapers and slogans on their protest banners showed that they have a much better idea of the problems facing teachers than the PPTA or the media.



(Above) French students protest, 1968  
(Left) Police and teachers confront Christchurch students who walked out of their classes during the June protests

university students occupied their university and ran it democratically through mass meetings.

Workers quickly followed the students' example and started occupying their factories and offices. Within days a general strike involving millions of people was underway.

At first, the workers' demands were largely economic: they wanted a bigger share of the profits they created for the bosses. But because so many workers were on strike, they had to come up with alternative ways of distributing food, making sure there was petrol for essential services like ambulances and fire engines (but not police cars!) and generally organising themselves. In parts of France whole cities effectively came under the mass control of the working class through joint strike committees.

This incredible inventiveness and self-organisation also spread to the high schools. The revolt by French high school students is not only inspiring but very instructive, because it shows how people with no experience of union or workplace organisation can still develop their ideas quickly in a modern western country very much like New Zealand.

In France in 1968 about a third of the teachers actively participated in student-led school occupations, the rest going on strike. A pupil described the feeling:

Upon occupying the buildings the pupils for the first time really felt at home. Many observers were astonished at first by the seriousness of the occupier. They imagined that the pupils would take advantage of the occasion to run wild and even damage the places. But why should they damage *their* materials, smash up *their* classrooms, sabotage *their* own work? It is on this point that the pupil occupations ran parallel with the factory occupations. In both cases, the work tools were respected because they were so much more responsible on discovering that they could function by the activity of the rank and file alone, without interference of administrative hierarchies or the bosses.

One school embarked on a three week educational experiment:

Each group organised its work as it wanted, studying one subject in the morning and deciding how to run the timetable (introduction, practical exercises, small groups etc.). From 12 to 12.30 the pupils of each class, 1) decided the aim of the operation and wrote down conclusions which would help them when they returned to the matter, 2) prepared the next day's work deciding who would introduce a subject, what books to bring etc. In the afternoon there were political discussions (in the widest sense of the term), and cultural activities: theatrical works, the reading of passages, films, until four.

Complete democracy prevailed. Delegates were elected from each class and from the teachers and other school workers for various committees. The head was to be elected every three years, and subject to recall by a two thirds majority of the school Committee for Joint Control ■

## **Arbitration – A no win game**

Arbitration forces workers to fight on the grounds where employers are strongest and we are weakest – and there's a long history of attempts at Arbitration in New Zealand.

The Arbitration system, passed into law in 1894, dominated New Zealand industrial relations for the next 80 years.

Arbitration meant that workers and employers had to take disputes before an Arbitration Court whose decisions were binding. In other words workers effectively gave up the right to fight on their own ground and instead had to battle it out in the legal system where the employers were at their strongest.

No wonder then that workers were quickly disappointed by Arbitration. Unfavourable awards, delays and lack of enforcement by the court against employers were all common complaints. In 1906 the first illegal strike took place and was quickly followed by others, eventually leading to the great Waterfront Strike of 1913.

### **Nil Wage Order**

Arbitration was finally defeated in the early 1970s.

In 1968 the Arbitration Court handed down a "Nil" wage order. Despite compelling evidence of declining living

standards, the court announced that "economic difficulties" facing the country meant that employers couldn't be expected to raise wages.

Thousands of workers took part in angry stopwork meetings and protest marches. With the threat of widespread unrest, the Employers' Federation hastily submitted a new proposal jointly with the FOL union confederation. The judge was outvoted and a five percent general wage rise passed.

The whole Arbitration system was discredited. Even the FOL leadership now recognised that "Trade unionists are becoming increasingly aware that Compulsory Arbitration protects the interests of the employers and restricts the efforts of workers."

After 1968 the Arbitration Court became increasingly irrelevant as direct bargaining between unions and employers became the rule. Of course the bosses didn't like this, and Acts of Parliament were passed to try and hold down wages. These were largely failures against a background of increasing working class militancy and anger. Despite attempts in the '70s to replace the Arbitration Court with new wage fixing tribunals, the defeat of the 1968 Nil Wage order was Compulsory Arbitration's death-knell. ■

# Trade unions and struggle

**Paul Holmes calls the PPTA a "dinosaur union" – by which he means they're fighting for better conditions for their members. If only! What's wrong with the union leadership? It's not because they're bad people – it's something more fundamental, argues David Garland.**

For people new to socialist politics, the experience of trade unions is often contradictory. On the one hand there's the lack of union presence or activism in their workplaces. For many that glossy magazine that arrives once a month and a reminder to renew their membership at year's end is the only sign the union exists.

aims are narrower and consist primarily of attempting to improve the terms on which their members sell their labour power to the bosses. They are the basic defensive organisations of the working class.

And it works. Generally unionised industries have better wages and working conditions than non-unionised.

This process of negotiation over wages and conditions is more or less ongoing, and under the current setup is often very detailed. Which brings me to the subject of the union officials. At the lower levels these people are very useful, especially for forgetful

delegates. Their role in the union is pretty much to help the members work out what they want and how to get it.

But the higher up in the union bureaucracy they get, the more out of touch with the membership they become. Their conditions of work change. They are often paid more than their members, have better working conditions, and the use of "company" cars.

More importantly, the nature of their work changes. They spend more time dealing with judges, lawyers, government officials and other union bureaucrats than in meetings with

their members. Brokering deals with the employers becomes a full-time job. Eventually, settling disputes becomes more important than winning their members' demands.

There are however, limits to this process. Because union officials are elected, they can't afford to get so out of touch with their members that they are no longer seen as representing the interests of the rank and file.

Also, the officials' ultimate weapon is their ability to bring production to a grinding halt by calling for strike action. Therefore, the boss has to believe that the union officials can bring this about at the drop of a hat. They are much less likely to believe this of an unpopular union leadership.

Despite these limitations, unions can play a progressive role, not only in defending workers economically, but also in political campaigns. In fact, some of the first ever battles to bring about a more democratic society were fought by the Chartists, an early form of mass trade union.

In the late '60s and '70s there were important union led struggles in this country too, with workers successfully defeating attempts by employers and the government to lower living standards.

These highpoints of struggle came after years of demoralising periods of inactivity. And they were made possible because activists, often socialists, kept the traditions of basic class solidarity and trade union membership alive.

That is why every worker should be an active union member. And why socialists should be in the forefront of arguing for union membership in their workplaces, even when it seems nothing will ever happen. ■



On the other hand there's the sight of unions picketing during a strike, or mass protests overseas where unions play a prominent role.

Unfortunately, the latter experience is less common than the humdrum of the average working day. Most of the time unions concern themselves, not with grand political issues and militant demonstrations, but with the details of the wages and conditions of their members.

Trade unions, unlike revolutionary socialist groups, don't exist to overthrow the capitalist system. Their



# contagion in Latin America

**Tom Lewis looks at the crisis spreading from Argentina to other South American countries**

Part of the decision by the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Bush administration to let Argentina go to the wall last year involved their calculation that an Argentine meltdown could safely be contained. They went so far as to inoculate Brazil – Latin America's largest economy – against possible contagion by stepping up a multi-billion dollar loan. It wasn't the first time George "W" and the IMF were dead wrong.

The past months have witnessed the dramatic spread not only of the economic crisis but also of popular



*Argentina's troubles (Above) have spread to Uruguay (Below Left) where desperate workers demanded food outside supermarkets, in scenes almost identical to Argentina less than a year ago*

struggle to neighbouring Uruguay, Paraguay, Peru, and Brazil. In addition, political instability in Bolivia, Ecuador, and Venezuela has given new impetus to the social movements. Latin America is presently seething with anger against its own rulers and with hatred of US imperialism.

## **Victories against privatisation**

Since the end of military dictatorship in 1985, Uruguay has represented one of the most stable societies in Latin America. Its prosperity owed much to the so-called Argentine "miracle" of the early and mid 1990s. But this June the country boiled over in protest. The close links to Argentina that once benefited Uruguay have started to poison its economy.

The confiscation of dollar accounts in Argentina severely damaged Uruguay's major industry of tourism this summer – so much so that Uruguay's gross domestic product dropped ten percent between January and March 2002. Investor confidence, moreover, has evaporated. Moody's "country risk" for foreign investment in Uruguay held steady at 200 points throughout the Argentine revolt last December. Confidence is so low today that Uruguay's country risk has jumped to 1,250 points.

On June 20 the Uruguayan government was forced to abandon its currency board and float its peso – which then fell ten percent in two days. The economic destruction unleashed several days of protest in which tens of thousands marched in Argentine-style anti-government



cacerolazos (pot-banging demonstrations).

From mid May to early June, mass struggle paralysed Paraguay and its capital city, Asunción. The Congreso Democrático del Pueblo (People's Democratic Congress) – comprised of 1,500 delegates from the main peasant organisations, workers' unions, left political parties, feminist, and homeless groups – called on May 15 for an indefinite mass mobilisation against IMF-imposed plans to privatise several banks and public services. The mobilisation also aimed to stop the government's proposed new "anti-terrorist" law. After three weeks of intense showdowns, the government surrendered and backtracked on both the privatisations and the repressive legislation.

A second spectacular victory against privatisation occurred in Arequipa, Peru in mid June. President Alejandro Toledo, whose election last year reflected anti-neoliberal sentiment throughout the country, nonetheless has proven spineless in dealing with the IMF.

But when Toledo recently sought to follow through on privatising electric power in Arequipa, as the IMF required, he suddenly found himself confronted by one of the largest mass movements in Peru in years. Organised by the Frente Amplio Cívico de Arequipa (the Broad Civic Front of Arequipa), the movement began on June 13 and quickly spread to the cities of Puno, Tacna, Cuzco, and Moquega.

The Peruvian mobilisation included road blockades, urban barricades, and battles with police that resulted in one

death and 152 wounded in Arequipa alone. After a declaration of martial law failed to quell the protests in the Arequipa region, the Toledo government finally agreed to postpone its privatisation plans indefinitely.

### Doomsday for Brazil

A crisis of proportions potentially rivaling those of the past year in Argentina now lurks on the horizon for Brazil.

Brazil's internal and external debt has risen to 55 percent of GDP. Its main debtors for both the internal and external debt, unlike Argentina's, are Brazilian institutions. In mid 2002, the interest rate on the combined public debt rose to 18.5 percent, despite an inflation rate of less than six percent.



This means that the government is paying 12 percent in real interest charges, whereas countries like Mexico and Chile pay less than three percent. A large chunk of Brazilian debt is also indexed to the US dollar, raising the spectre of higher interest rates

and a higher share of debt in relation to GDP. Brazil is expected to face default on one or both of its internal and external debts in the first quarter of 2003.

The currency has dipped to its lowest point against the US dollar since its creation in 1994. Foreign investment is slowing too, as Brazil's country risk is now second only to

Argentina's in Latin America and has climbed as high as Nigeria's. This creates a chokehold on the world's eighth largest economy. The lurking scenario is a familiar one: capital flight, a falling currency, and a collapse of the banking system – all propelled by the expectation of debt default.



*Soup kitchens (Above) and beggars (Below) – two symbols of Argentina's worsening economic and social crisis*

### A return to state terror?

In Argentina, events have taken another deadly turn. The immensely unpopular government of

President Eduardo Duhalde resorted to murder on June 26 in order to intimidate protesters and to guarantee "law and order" throughout the country. Two dead, 90 wounded, and close to 200 arrested in Buenos Aires represented the balance of state terror after a tense day of struggle between *piqueteros* (unemployed workers) and police.

The *piqueteros'* signature tactic of blocking roads is known for its peaceful character. But as 1,000 *piqueteros* tried to blockade a bridge in a working class suburb of Buenos Aires, police fired unprovoked into the crowd. The death toll has risen to 37 since mass demonstrations toppled the government of former President Fernando de la Rúa last December.

The day after the massacre popular outrage led 40,000 to protest the killings in front of the Presidential House at the Plaza de Mayo. This pressure, and the threat of an even larger mass backlash, forced Duhalde to dismiss Buenos Aires' police chief.



Nevertheless, the police chief was merely following orders. In early June, Duhalde declared he would respond with increased repression to the almost daily marches and rallies aimed at denouncing the government's capitulation to the International Monetary Fund. The IMF has demanded new and harsher austerity measures as the condition for restarting loans in the midst of Argentina's economic meltdown.



(Above) President Duhalde  
(Right and Below Right) Uruguay protests

Duhalde, who has broken all of his promises to stand up to the IMF and US bankers, delivered on another promise – to get tough with protesters. Ironically, on the same day as Duhalde's police were killing and maiming Argentine workers, his economy minister, Roberto Lavagna, was in Washington cow-towing to IMF officials.

Shortly after Lavagna's return, Duhalde announced that he would call presidential elections for March 2003 – six months ahead of schedule. This likely indicates that the IMF has agreed to provide enough money to help hold Argentina's international creditors at bay, but considerably less than is needed to remedy mass hunger and unemployment

The June 26 murders represent only the beginning of a heightening of

violence. Not content with starving the population to death, Argentina's rulers have left no doubt that they will beat or shoot to death all those who attempt to challenge the system.

The process of class polarisation and the development of a potentially revolutionary upheaval continue to unfold even in the face of repression. A second mass demonstration to protest the government killings took place during the first week of July. Already in late June, ex-president Carlos Menem – who advocates full dollarisation of the Argentine economy – told the press that "the streets of Argentina are full of Marxists."

Duhalde's current foreign minister, Carlos Ruckhauf, also gave a hair-raising speech to high ranking air force officers at the end of June. He recalled that he was the government minister back in the mid 1970s who had signed into law the bill that became the basis of Argentina's "dirty war" and "campaign against terrorism." More than 30,000 leftist militants were either killed or "disappeared" during the dirty war. Ruckhauf assured the air force officers that he would sign such a law again – "without any hesitation" – if "difficult times" reappear.

In this climate, unity among the forces opposed to the Duhalde government and the policies of US imperialism has become especially important. The struggle to throw out Duhalde and to cast off the yoke of the IMF can only intensify. It should also include plans for organised self-defence.

## Electoral barometer

Duhalde will not run in the March election – no doubt a smart decision given that his approval rating fell to eight percent in early July. Opinion polls show Elisa Carrió, a progressive congresswoman, and Luis Zamora, a left-wing congressman and former leader of Argentina's once influential Trotskyist Movimiento al Socialismo (MAS), as comfortable frontrunners if elections were held this now.



Menem, the former president who did the most to implement the destructive neoliberal economic policies of the 1990s, and Carlos Reutemann, a former Formula One racer and current governor of the state of Santa Fe, were tied far behind at seven percent each. Reutemann is the preferred candidate of the US

In Bolivia, the recent presidential election showed a stunning advance for peasant and *cocalero* (coca grower) leader Evo Morales and his Movimiento al Socialismo. While the two leading establishment candidates each got 22 percent of the vote, Morales received a surprising 21 percent. The newly elected Bolivian congress will determine who will be



the new president in August, so it is unlikely that Morales can accede to power by parliamentary means. Nevertheless, the size of Morales' vote signals a clear radicalisation in Bolivian politics.

The substantial lead held in the polls by Luis Inácio Lula da Silva, the presidential candidate of the Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT, Workers' Party), is adding fuel to the fires of economic uncertainty in Brazil. Lula is perceived by Wall Street and the IMF as someone likely to increase government spending. To calm investors' fears, Lula has promised the international financial community that he will service the external debt and observe fiscal responsibility.

Lula and the PT also support Brazil's participation in the US-led Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA). Yet a major Brazilian campaign against the FTAA over the next few months is scheduled to culminate in a people's plebiscite on the FTAA in September. Three years ago six million votes were cast in a similar plebiscite on canceling external debt payments – with 95 percent voting to repudiate the debt outright. Investors fear that the results of the FTAA plebiscite may pressure Lula to move back towards a more cautious position on hemispheric economic integration.

Other developments throughout Latin America revealed evidence of widespread political instability. On June 20 Mexican president Vicente Fox admitted that the crises in Argentina and Brazil are beginning to affect Mexico. Ecuador's finance minister resigned on June 23, caught up in a bribery scandal.

In early July, a detachment of army soldiers exchanged fire with members of the National Police in Guatemala during an episode that

implicated the army in recent kidnappings. Apparently the soldiers had come to collect the ransom money. The incident publicly exposed the hollowness of the so-called "peace process," in which government and army corruption effectively block political reform.

Meanwhile, Costa Rica signed an agreement with the US to open an International Police School (Escuela Internacional de Policía) under US control as a means of strengthening Latin American armed forces.

There can be no doubt that a major US imperialist offensive is underway in Latin America – spearheaded by Plan Colombia, the IMF, and the FTAA. That makes one more reason why building an anti-imperialist movement is more necessary than ever. ■



*A young piquetero in Argentina*

Perhaps the most sinister single image to emerge recently has been the picture broadcast over Latin American television stations and Univisión of a masked right-wing paramilitary commando vowing to start a contra war aimed at ousting democratically elected Venezuelan president Hugo Chávez. This declaration follows on the heels of the failed coup against Chávez carried out by right-wing business leaders and generals – with the approval and support of the US embassy and the CIA. It surely indicates the Bush administration's move to open a military as well as a political strategy to get rid of Chávez.

# RED WORDS

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REVIEWS, REVIEWS, REVIEWS...



## *In a Land of Plenty*

Directed by Alister Barry

112 minutes

NZ (2002)

Reviewed by Dougal McNeill

Wellington's Paramount Cinema on Courtenay Place was packed when, just a few days out from the general election, a crowd of mostly older people came to see *In a Land of Plenty*, a documentary by Alister Barry – known for his work *Someone Else's Country* – about unemployment in New Zealand.

Barry had the guts to do what no other New Zealand filmmaker has done. He has gone behind the blithering and the bullshit of Treasury and the New Right academics to make a history of how, after the election of the Fourth Labour Government in 1984, unemployment was made a central instrument of economic policy. In order to keep inflation down and rescue profits for businesses, Treasury deliberately let the level of unemployment rise no matter what the social and personal costs. Under National, they stepped up their assault on workers and the unemployed by slashing benefits and services.

There is a very revealing part in this film where we learn how Treasury analysts calculated benefit cuts to a level they knew was below that needed to healthily feed a family. I came away from watching this film with a renewed sense of disgust at the way the modern “free market economy” is based on the cruel exploitation of ordinary people.

*In a Land of Plenty* is worth seeing for the file footage Barry has foraged out alone. There's some brilliant shots of protests against unemployment and attacks on workers, and a truly wonderful moment where Richard Prebble gets an egg straight in the face – a present from a laid-off worker! There are also some very good scenes exposing the smear campaign against beneficiaries WINZ ran in the late '90s, and showing what sort of lies and propaganda a government department is prepared to use to turn public opinion.

But, despite these undeniably strong points, I do have some quite serious criticisms of *In a Land of Plenty*. It didn't examine the international context of the right wing attack at all – as if New Zealand was a sheltered little paradise until '84, our past was a rosy one and Thatcher and Reagan didn't exist. This prevented us as an audience from gaining any understanding of *why* the terrible assaults on workers and the unemployed happened when and how they did, and not in another time.

Barry is also very uncritical of union officials and Labour Party politicians. Ken Douglas – who played a leading role in clamping down on any fightback from within the union movement – Jim Anderton and others are all interviewed and their words are allowed to pass without comment. This makes *In a Land of Plenty* quite a depressing film because, even though it does show us how terrible the New Right is, it doesn't present even the image of an alternative. The usual sellouts are allowed to pass the whole thing off as inevitable, and that's it.

Which is a shame. The hard work Barry has put into finding so many excellent moments of resistance should serve as inspiration for us to take up the struggle now, and not reinforce nostalgia and gloom, as some of the older middle class people in the audience seemed to be feeling.

But don't let these criticisms put you off. Because *In a Land of Plenty* isn't your usual piece of right wing bullshit, don't expect to see it on TV anytime soon. But do look out for it at the video stores, or write to Community Media Trust, P O Box 3563, Wellington. Copies cost \$30. ■



### *The Navigators*

Directed by Ken Loach

96 Minutes

UK/Germany/Spain (2001)

Reviewed by Andrew Cooper

A railway workers' depot, South Yorkshire, 1995. The rail system has been privatised and a bunch of grasping private companies will force workers from different depots to compete against each other for maintenance work.

In the film's hilarious opening piece, the hapless depot manager has to read out a "mission statement" for their new company. "We have to 'think safety'. Deaths must be kept to an acceptable level."

At first the workers treat the privatisation and its absurd new rules as a joke. But then the company devises new ways to divide and rule, sacking or forcing out most staff and eventually closing the depot. They are forced to work as contract labour, with no holidays, sick pay or guarantee of work. They must be on call to work at any time, get their own transport to jobs on the rail tracks, and buy their own safety clothing and equipment.

Instead of putting worker and passenger safety first, the rival rail track companies are only interested in putting the blame for any derailments onto other companies. Workers who complain about lack of safety are blacklisted by the employment agencies and not given future work. The film's conclusion is a fatal accident caused by fatigue and understaffing. The other workers, terrified of losing what work they have left, cover it up to avoid blame.

With a couple of exceptions, most importantly 1995's Spanish Civil War epic *Land and Freedom*, Ken Loach's films of the past decade have dealt with the experiences

of British workers in a period of defeat and downturn in struggle. As one critic put it, they are about ducking and diving as class struggle, of guerrilla war and individual resistance within the capitalist system.

Is Ken Loach being overly pessimistic? Without doubt his style is one of extreme realism. His work has always reflected the real level of working class political consciousness and struggle in Britain, and, unfortunately, in the past decade this has been at a low ebb.

In the 1960s he made powerful indictments of the Labour government's failure to address social issues such as homelessness in his 1966 TV play *Cathy Come Home*. His more overtly political films in the early '70s were celebrations of working class victory as well as explanations of the role of Labour and union leaders in trying to undermine those struggles.



Ken Loach

His 1983 documentary *Questions of Leadership*, exposing the role of union leaders in failing to resist Margaret Thatcher's war on the working class was effectively censored. It criticised the very people the Conservatives were relying on to smash the coal miners and strengthen the hand of the union bureaucracy at the expense of rank and file workers.

The 1990s saw a series of powerful feature films. What characterises these is not just the portrayal of workers in defeat, but also, until 1998's *My Name is Joe*, the presence of at least one character who either explicitly argues for or at least shows in some way the possibility of a collective rather than individual response.

In *Riff Raff*, the one politically conscious worker is sacked when he asks for basic safety procedures to be followed. There is no sense of an alternative to this, no strike or attempt by the other workers to resist collectively. The only fightback is a purely individual one – when a worker dies through lack of safety two other labourers burn down the luxury flats they are building.

*My Name is Joe* was the only film in this period not to even have one character pointing the way to an alternative. Its main character is a former alcoholic struggling to get by in a working class area devastated by years of unemployment.

*The Navigators* does have one character, a union delegate of some kind, who tries to stand up for the workers. But he too is laid off like the others. Despite its often marvellous humour then, *The Navigators* is essentially a rather depressing film where the workers are little more than passive victims.

Ken Loach has been widely criticised by the left for this. But we have to see his recent work as reflecting what is doubtless the reality for most workers in the '90s – trying to simply survive rather than fight back. His other recent work, 2000's *Bread and Roses*, about a Los Angeles cleaners' strike, showed that this pessimism is not permanent but a response to the experiences of the vast majority of workers in recent years.

*The Navigators* won't give you much idea about how to fight back, but it will definitely stoke your feelings of class hatred! More importantly, taken together Ken Loach's recent work, especially *Land and Freedom*, will leave audiences inspired and aware that defeat is *not* inevitable. ■

*The New Rulers of the World*  
By John Pilger  
Verso, 2002  
Reviewed by Paul D'Amato

This is the best of all the post-September 11 books that expose the murderous hypocrisy of US foreign policy.

It covers seemingly widely different topics, from the West's complicity in Indonesia's 1965 coup to Washington's new "great game" in South Asia, to Australia's shameful mistreatment of its Aboriginal population. But as Pilger points out, "The narrative that links all four chapters is the legacy of the 'old' imperialism and its return to respectability as 'globalisation' and the 'war on terrorism'."

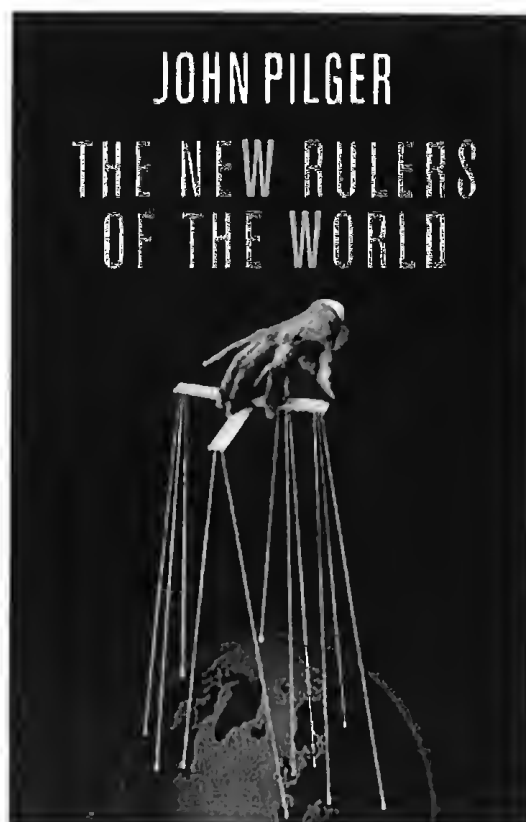
The first chapter, "The model pupil," chillingly retells the story of how the US and Britain conspired with the Indonesian military to overthrow the nationalist leader Sukarno and embark on a mass slaughter of members of the Communist Party (PKI) that killed over 500,000 people – an event ranked even by the CIA as "one of the worst mass murders of the 20th century."

They ought to know. The CIA gave the Indonesian military a list of 5,000 people to be assassinated and provided the army field communication equipment to coordinate the massacre.

The post-coup economic machinations are telling. In 1967, the US and Europe's top corporate giants met with Suharto's top economic advisers. The latter were eager to sell the stable new Indonesia of cheap labour and vast exploitable resources.

"On the second day," writes Pilger, "the Indonesian economy was carved up, sector by sector."

This little known episode captures the connection between the political, the military, and the economic. "Free



markets," it seems, are markets pried open with the help of unthinkable violence.

That this isn't just history is made abundantly clear by Pilger's next chapter, "Paying the price." Here the reader will find out how the US-enforced United Nations sanctions on Iraq have killed over a million people, more than half of them children. But Pilger gives this horrific story a more human, and therefore more tragic, face. Every day dozens of children die from preventable illnesses as a result of the embargo on many medicines.

On a visit to Iraq, one doctor described to Pilger how a boy with a "beautiful nature" had died of Hodgkin's, a disease that is cured in 95 percent of cases with the proper treatment: "I am a doctor," he tells Pilger. "I am not supposed to cry, but I cry every day... These children could live and grow up; and when you see your son and daughter in front of you, dying, what happens to you?"

For those with illusions in the UN as some kind of force for peace in the world, Pilger's book is a strong antidote. He recounts a conversation

with the UN chair of the Iraq sanctions committee.

"How much power does the United States exercise over your committee?," Pilger asks pointedly.

"We operate by consensus," comes the reply.

"And what if the Americans object?"

"We don't operate."

This pretty much sums up the chain of command at the UN.

The pivotal chapter, "The Great Game," goes into lurid detail to show how the US has used September 11 to reshape a new imperialism, for which fighting "terrorism" has become the new cover.

The story is peppered with tyrants, funded and trained by the biggest tyrant, the US government, who then "slip the leash" and become "evildoers." The Taleban, before it became an "evildoer," was seen as an ally in Washington's efforts to secure a pipeline through the region.

Moreover, the US is not only the biggest perpetrator of state terror but harbours terrorists within its own borders – from right-wing Cuban hijackers to School of the Americas trained death squad leaders.

Two thumbs up. Way up. ■

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### *The Scar*

By China Miéville

Macmillan, 2002

Reviewed by Andrew Cooper

*"Scars are not injuries...*

*A scar is a healing.*

*After injury, a scar is what  
makes you whole."*

I bet China Miéville doesn't suffer from writer's block.

His third book, and the second set in the imaginary world of Bas-Lag, is another doorstopper – the hardback

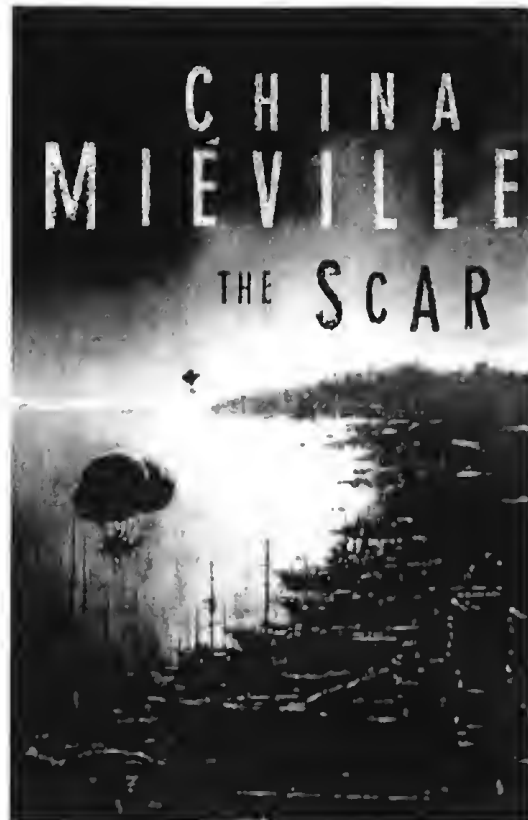
copy running to over 600 pages. In his last book, *Perdido Street Station*, Miéville used the struggles amongst alien races in the teeming, terrifying metropolis of New Crubozon as a metaphor for class conflict on Earth – and also as a way of highlighting the absurdity of racism.

Miéville, who is an active revolutionary socialist, devoted a large part of *Perdido Street Station* to world-building. In fact, what were obviously almost limitless quantities of ideas often threatened to overtake the actual plot.

In *The Scar*, the metaphors are more subtle and, I think, convincing. At the novel's beginning, Bellis Coldwine, a rather unlikeable woman on the brink of middle age, flees New Crubozon after unwittingly being implicated in the events described in the previous novel. Her ship is captured and she becomes a prisoner-citizen of the floating pirate city of Armada.

Armada is a floating allegory, a microcosm of human politics. Divided into several districts, each with a different form of government, they range from liberal democracy to anarchy to absolute monarchy – though my favourite, I must admit, was the Vampir (sic) Quarter with its Goretax (residents must let the Vampir ruling class drink their blood in exchange for protection and lower taxes!)

And what is *The Scar*? Well, it's a place, sure. But it's also about the scars (both physical and mental) that everyone carries around with them. Both types of scarring are combined in Armada's rulers, The Lovers, and with them Miéville gives one of the scariest portrayals of obsession – with both each other and their political agenda – ever. Their monomaniacal quest for "The Scar" – a source of unimaginable power – unleashes a series of disastrous events leading to



political upheaval and mutiny.

As the conclusion makes clear, numerous interpretations of the story are possible. It is, most importantly, about the powerlessness of individuals, no matter how heroic, under capitalism. Only through unity – however fleeting – do the Armadans begin to plot their own destiny.

The amazing inventiveness of *Perdido Street Station* is still there in *The Scar*, but the story and characters seem more rounded, subtle and complex. I just hope China Miéville doesn't get writer's block, because I'm already looking forward to the next instalment.

Recommended. ■

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# just what **are** your politics anyway?

**The more observant among you may have noticed that this magazine's politics aren't quite the same as the mainstream media's. So just where do we stand? Below are some of the basic political ideas behind our magazine.**

**Socialism** Capitalism is a system of crisis, exploitation and war in which production is for profit, not human need.

Although workers create society's wealth, they have no control over its production or distribution. A new society can only be built when workers collectively seize control of that wealth and create a new state in which they will make the decisions about the economy, social life and the environment.

**Workers' Power** Only the working class has the power to create a society free from exploitation, oppression and want.

Liberation can be won only through the struggles of workers themselves, organised independently of all other classes and fighting for real workers' power – a new kind of state based on democratically elected workers' councils.

China and Cuba, like the former Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, have nothing to do with socialism. They are repressive state capitalist regimes. We support the struggles of workers against every ruling class.

**Revolution Not Reformism** Despite the claims of Labour, Alliance and trade union leaders, the structures of the present parliament, army, police and judiciary cannot be taken over and used by the working class.

They grew up under capitalism and are designed to protect the ruling class against workers.

There is no parliamentary road to socialism.

**Internationalism** Workers in every country are exploited by capitalism, so the struggle for socialism is part of a worldwide struggle.

We oppose everything that divides workers of different countries. We oppose all immigration controls.

We campaign for solidarity with workers in other countries. We oppose imperialism and support all genuine national liberation struggles.

**Liberation From Oppression** We fight for democratic rights. We are opposed to the oppression of women, Māori, Pacific Islanders, gays and lesbians. These forms of oppression are used to divide the working class.

We support the right of all oppressed groups to organise for their own defence.

All these forms of liberation are essential to socialism and impossible without it.

**Tino Rangatiratanga** We support the struggle for tino rangatiratanga.

Māori capitalists and politicians have no interest in achieving tino rangatiratanga for working class Māori.

The Government and corporate warriors' approach to Treaty claims has benefited a Māori elite while doing little for working class Māori.

Tino rangatiratanga cannot be achieved within capitalism. It will only become a reality with the establishment of a workers' state and socialist society.

**Revolutionary Organisation** To achieve socialism, the most militant sections of the working class have to be organised into a revolutionary socialist party. Such a party can only be built by day to day activity in the mass organisations of the working class.

We have to prove in practice to other workers that reformist leaders and reformist ideas are opposed to their own interests.

We have to build a rank and file movement within the unions.

We are beginning to build such a party, linking the ideas of revolutionary socialism to workers' struggles against the system. If you agree with our ideas and want to fight for socialism, we urge you to join us.

## Appeal

Well, we finally raised all the money we needed. Thanks again to everyone whose donations made it possible. *Socialist Review* is now being produced using an Apple iBaak computer and new laser printer. This setup is making the production process a lot faster and easier for all involved.

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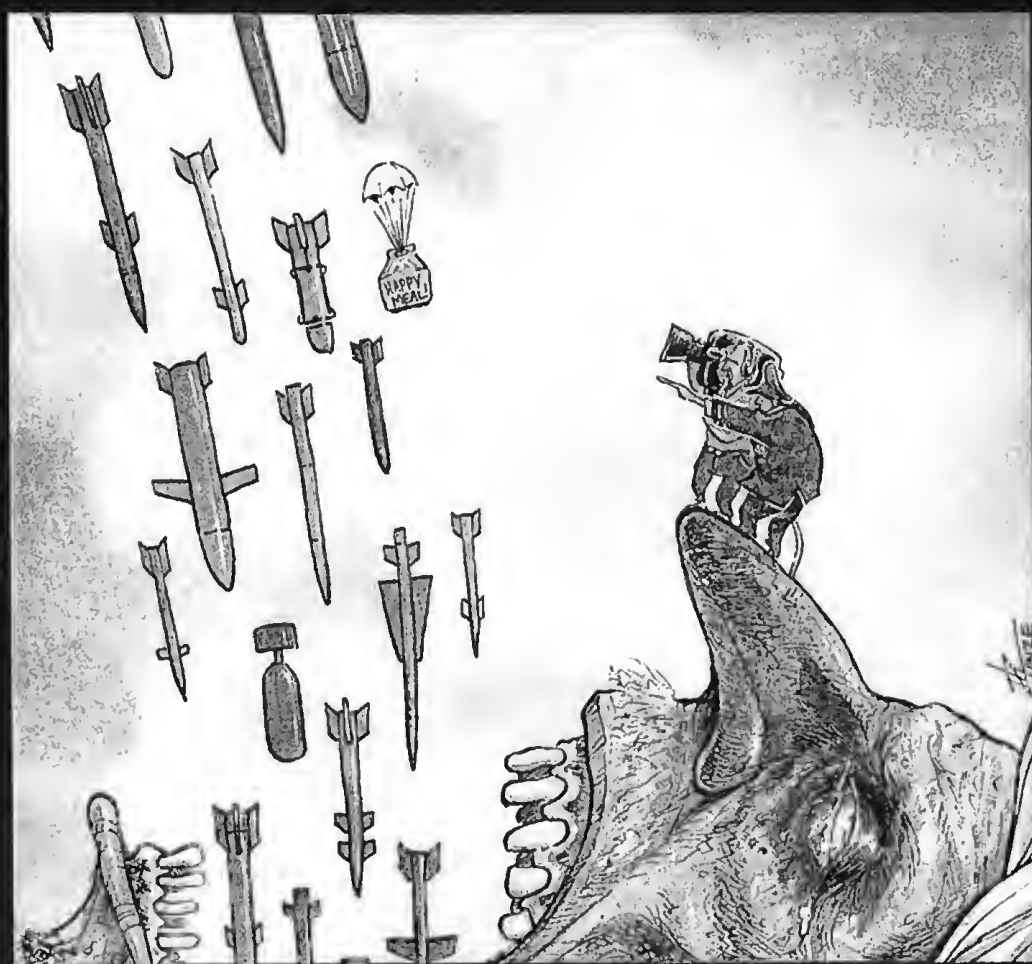
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